

THE ROLE OF RECREATIONAL READING IN HIGH SCHOOL MEDIA CENTERS: FOUR CASE STUDIES

by
Elizabeth Spackman

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April, 2003

Approved by:

Advisor

Elizabeth Spackman. The Role of Recreational Reading in High School Media Centers: Four Case Studies. A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April 2003. 50 pages. Advisor: Evelyn H. Daniel.

This paper reports the results of four case studies of recreational reading in high school media centers. Interviews were conducted with media specialists and websites were analyzed for the presence of items related to recreational reading. The four North Carolina high schools in this study participate in a variety of activities to promote recreational reading, including programming, readers' advisory services, and public relations. Common programs include contests, author visits, book groups, and curriculum-related projects. The media specialists suggest books to students and teachers, in addition to offering bibliographies and other indirect readers' advisory resources. Public relations efforts prevalent in the four schools involve booktalks, displays, and book reviews on the media center website. Media specialists also discussed their attitudes toward recreational reading, affirming that they value recreational reading. The librarians cited testing and busy student schedules as reducing the amount of time the students spend reading recreationally.

Headings:

- Reading incentive programs

- School libraries -- Book programs

- School libraries -- High Schools

- School libraries -- North Carolina

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Research Question	5
Literature Review	6
Methodology	9
Results	11
Discussion	40
Conclusions and Future Research	44
References	46
Appendix A: Consent Form	48
Appendix B: Interview Questions	49

Introduction

“We read books to find out who we are. What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel... is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become.” --Ursula K. LeGuin

In recent years, our society has seen the rise of visually engaging technology such as television, video games, and the Internet. It seems that many children spend large amounts of time outside school hours passively watching TV or playing video games. These children are losing out on an active, creative, engaging behavior—reading. Research has shown that reading for fun helps children learn.

When children are in elementary school, they are excited to learn how to read. Many love to read, and they choose this behavior over others. However, as children grow older, they read less and less. Often, students feel that school diminishes their desire to read by assigning boring, dull texts for homework reading. In addition, recent years have seen the advent of statewide testing requirements that leave little time for in-school recreational reading.

Since teenagers spend much of their time at school and involved in school activities, the high school media center has the potential to be pivotal in encouraging young adults to read. The high school library can be a safe place for teenagers to discover themselves and explore options through reading fiction or other material recreationally. High school media specialists are the intermediaries between their students and the materials in the library. Therefore, media specialists can play a key role in encouraging their students to read.

Traditionally, young adults have been a hard group to reach. Teenagers often feel rebellious towards authority figures, such as librarians and teachers. However, the teenage years are crucial for identity formation. According to developmental theorist Erik Erikson (1993), adolescents are going through the stage of Identity vs. RoleDiffusion. They are trying to figure out who they are and how they fit into the world. Reading can help young adults forge their identities.

Reading will not only help students in their personal development; it helps in academic pursuits as well. Readers are exposed to new words, new concepts, and new worlds that allow them to make connections between their experience, the experience of others, and their academic studies. Readers learn thought processes that can be successfully applied to school projects. Clearly, reading has many benefits.

Research Question

The current role of recreational reading in the high school media center is unclear in the research. Many librarians are advocates for recreational reading, particularly at the public library. Is recreational reading an important part of the high school media center? Have recent educational trends affected recreational reading at the high school level? What is the role of the high school media specialist in promoting recreational reading? What techniques do media specialists employ to promote recreational reading? In particular, do they use programming, readers' advisory services, or public relations efforts?

For this study, recreational reading is defined as reading for pleasure that is unrelated to school assignments. Programming refers to one-time or ongoing events or activities coordinated and sponsored by a library. Readers' advisory is the process of

helping readers find books they might enjoy, and public relations efforts can include bulletin boards, booktalks, and media center websites.

Literature Review

Many researchers have documented the positive effects of recreational reading on academic achievement. Krashen repeatedly concludes that increased reading leads to increased reading achievement. In a short presentation in *The Book Report*, he claims that “access to books=more reading=more reading achievement” (Krashen 2002a). He also reviewed the National Reading Panel Report on Fluency, summarizing research on sustained silent reading programs (Krashen 2001b). He found that students who participate in these reading programs for a school year or more show improvement on reading comprehension tests, demonstrating that learning does occur during recreational reading. In addition, students in programs shorter than a year showed no difference in test scores when compared to students exposed to traditional instruction. Also, in a discussion of the whole language-phonics instruction debate in California, Krashen (2002b) asserts that lack of access to print materials is a factor in the state’s low reading scores. Much of Krashen’s philosophy is based on the idea that we learn language through materials that have personal meaning (Krashen 1989). McQuillan (1998) reviews the research and establishes that “more reading leads to better reading achievement.” He also concludes that voluntary reading and access to print materials will result in higher scores on reading tests. A comparison of library quality and SAT verbal scores shows that greater access to print materials is correlated with higher test scores (McQuillan 1998). In a study of eleventh graders, McQuillan and Au (2001) confirmed that a print-rich environment leads to increased reading frequency. Further, Gallik (1999)

reported a positive correlation between time spent reading for fun on vacations and grade point average in a group of undergraduate students.

Some researchers have found that reading enjoyment is increased with increased access to books. English as a second language (ESL) high school students in a sustained silent reading program showed great improvements in frequency and enjoyment of reading (Pilgreen and Krashen 1993). Ramos and Krashen (1998) reported that Hispanic elementary school students in Los Angeles, California, were more interested in reading after class visits to the public library. Morrow and Weinstein (1986) demonstrated that sixth graders use the school media center more when their classroom implements reading encouragement and literature programs.

Other investigators have studied school media centers and their effects on academic achievement. Lance (1994) found that students score better on reading tests in schools where media centers have more funding, and therefore more staff and bigger, more diverse collections. In addition, his study highlighted the importance of the media specialist acting in an instructional role. Krashen (1995) determined that school and public library quality is positively correlated with scores on reading comprehension tests.

Several researchers have documented the decline in recreational reading that occurs as children grow older and move from elementary school to middle school to high school. In her article "Once Upon a Time," Mitchell (1992) compares data from her own high school in Indianapolis to other studies to confirm that students read recreationally less and less as they grow older. Mitchell cited studies administered by *Weekly Reader* and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. She suggests several reasons why young adults read less than children do, including "1) educational methodologies, 2)

traumatic learning experiences, 3) obstacles during the teen-age years, and 4) growing up with non-readers.” To her dismay, another high school media specialist cites curriculum demands and extracurricular activities as preventing teenagers from reading (Glover 1992). While describing a successful reading encouragement program, a high school media specialist in North Carolina claims that developing social lives and athletics take precedence over reading in the lives of middle school students (Stone 2000). However, Krashen (2001a) refutes the claim that teenagers need to be encouraged to read. He cites several polls that show these young people like to read, and that they read a significant amount.

A survey of public librarians, the majority in Indiana, confirmed that programming for young adults is an essential service to this population (Raymer 1992). A school librarian in Texas encourages an active, direct approach to young adult programming in the school in order to reach teens (Bull 1989). There are many examples in the literature of programming that encourages reading for young adults at school libraries. Maxwell describes a program in which high school students created book covers for library books (2000). Other media specialists report the success of bringing authors into their schools (Gordon 2002, Carlson and Sherman 2000). Gomberg (1987) and the article “Gold Star Ideas” (1992) present a variety of successful reading encouragement programs, including contests, displays, and reading clubs. Trelease and Krashen (1996) encourage libraries to allow children to have food in the library as a means of encouraging reading and library use. Obviously reading encouragement has been important to school library media specialists.

Will reading encouragement continue to be a priority for school media center specialists? In her 1994 book *School Library Media Centers in the 21st Century*, Craver discusses some potential changes for school libraries. Most of these issues are focused around the changing face of information and technology. School library media specialists will be expected to train their students to manage the electronic environment. Craver does not address recreational reading.

Methodology

I conducted semi-structured interviews with high school media specialists at four high schools in the Chapel Hill-Durham area of North Carolina. These interviews provide intensive case studies of high school media centers; schools were chosen in part because of their convenient location. I also selected media centers where the media specialists had been at the schools for at least one year to ensure that they were familiar with the media center's practices as well as the school environment and culture. Two schools were part of the same city school system; the other schools were part of two different county systems.

I chose to conduct interviews rather than a survey for two main reasons: flexibility and response rate. The semi-structured interview has many advantages as a research tool, including flexibility and depth of information available (Robson 2002). Because I met with media specialists in person, I was able to ask questions based on interviewee response. In addition, I gathered a greater depth of information from interviews than would have been available from other research tools. The non-verbal communication of my interviewees highlighted important points and accentuated the information I gathered. Interviews also reduced potential problems with response rates.

Because I set up appointments and met in person with media specialists, I had a guaranteed amount of time to talk with my interviewees. A survey would not have allowed this set interaction. Survey respondents are free to leave spaces blank, whereas interviews allowed me to probe for the information I was interested in.

Interviews do have some disadvantages. The success of my interviews was dependent partly on my interviewing skills. Also, my results could have been affected by unintended bias. For example, I support recreational reading programming in high school libraries. My interviewees could have exaggerated their reading encouragement activities and attitudes because they might have sensed that I would be happier with that kind of response. The process of interviewing and transcribing was more time-intensive than other data collection tools; the actual interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes.

The process of conducting this study involved several steps. First, I submitted a proposal to Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina, which approved the use of human participants in my study. I used the Internet to identify potential schools and media specialists' contact information. I recruited participants for my study by emailing media specialists, telling them the subject of my research and asking for a convenient time for an interview. When I arrived at the schools, I first gave each interviewee a consent form informing them that I would protect their privacy. (See Appendix A for the consent form.) Then I began taping and conducted the interview. I transcribed the interviews fully, allowing me to quote the media specialists directly. In some cases, I followed up with questions via email, to clarify certain points.

To ensure the trustworthiness of my data, I took notes in addition to recording my interviews; I consulted my notes during the transcription process to verify the transcripts. I began with the same set of questions in each interview, and adapted the questions as needed, depending on the responses of my interviewees. (See Appendix B for a list of my interview questions.)

I also examined media center websites for items related to recreational reading. I accessed the websites on March 29, 2003.

Results

One school had two media specialists, both of whom contributed to the interview. Four media specialists earned their Master's of Library Science in the past 22 years, and a fifth is currently working on her degree. The media specialists have been working at their schools for a variety of years, ranging from 3-10 years.

All of the media specialists reported that recreational reading plays a role in their media centers, to varying degrees. Most discussed recreational reading activities in multiple categories of programming, readers' advisory, and public relations. Several media specialists mentioned that high school students are so busy with schoolwork, sports, other extracurricular activities, video games, and computers that they have little time left for recreational reading. However, they also noted that some of their students are avid readers. The role of recreational reading for each media center is described in detail below. Table 1 summarizes the results of this study.

Table 1: Summary of Results

School	Programming	Readers' Advisory	Public Relations
A	Monthly bookclub <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In existence 1 year ▪ Students and teachers attend ▪ Select books as a group Curricular projects (initiated by teachers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Genre anthology ▪ ESL recreational reading 	Indirect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bibliographies ▪ Lists of new books in teacher newsletter Direct <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suggestions to students, weekly ▪ None to teachers or administrators 	Window displays <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monthly PTSA involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the past Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recreational reading not addressed
B	Monthly contests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Themed ▪ Prizes related to themes Author visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the past Curricular projects (initiated by media specialist) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recreational reading library visits for English and ESL classes 	Indirect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fiction annotations in catalog ▪ Bibliographies ▪ Summer reading list for teachers and administrators Direct <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suggestions to students, daily ▪ Forming relationships with students ▪ Suggestions to teachers and administrators 	Bulletin boards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monthly; match contest themes Booktalks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When teachers will let media specialist come Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Book reviews, updated monthly ▪ Fiction and nonfiction reviews
C	Curricular projects (initiated by teachers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recreational reading visits for ESL classes and remedial level reading classes 	Indirect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reference tools ▪ Annotated lists of new fiction Direct <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suggestions to students; 12 "regulars" ▪ Suggestions to teachers and administrators 	Modeling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading at lunch Inviting atmosphere <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows some noise ▪ Encourages "sprawling" Getting to know students Brochure to parents, students, teachers, and staff PTSA involvement Displays Booktalks Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In development ▪ To include student book reviews
D	National Library Week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Themed ▪ Speakers—sometimes authors ▪ Contests and drawings ▪ Breakfast and drawings for teachers Curricular projects (initiated by the media specialist) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10th grade world literature projects ▪ 9th grade book review projects 	Indirect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annotated bibliographies ▪ NoveList ▪ Author bookmarks Direct <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suggestions to students; 5 times a week ▪ Suggestions to teachers; twice a week 	Bulletin boards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monthly Daily interactions Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student book reviews; updated 2-3 times a year

Media Center A

School A has a core of students who read recreationally. Some students come to the library every week to check out books that are unrelated to their school assignments. This core of reading students has not changed, and the media specialists do not expect it to. Similarly, the media center has not seen a change in the number of books checked out for pleasure reading. Some of the library student aides are avid readers, and one regularly browses the new book shelves, but rarely checks books out, claiming she doesn't have enough time to read.

This year, Media Center A has begun to host a student book club that meets monthly. A media center student aide provided the impetus to start the club. Approximately twelve students attend regularly, two of whom are boys. Some teachers attend the book club as well; there is interest in a separate book club for teachers. Refreshments are served as an incentive to attract teenagers. The group established some ground rules the first time they met, with the help of the media specialist. She did not want to set the rules, but the student who wanted to establish the club did not attend the first meeting. The media specialist feels that her influence is too much like a teacher's, and she wanted the group to function more on its own. The group decided to read the same book, as opposed to reading different books in a genre, for example. Most of the students buy their own copies of the book club books.

The students and teachers make the reading selections as a group; their past selections have included *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, by Betty Smith, *Ghost Boy*, by Anne Laurence, and *Lucifer's Hammer* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. The librarians select books for the group to consider, students make suggestions, and they consult

Internet book lists like Teen Read. Sometimes the diverse nature of the group makes the selection difficult. For example, when the club read *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the girls in the club enjoyed it, but the boys “roundly hated it.”

During book club discussion, a media specialist guides the conversation, because it can be difficult to keep the group on track. Again, the media specialist would prefer that the students performed this function, and some of them do help. Apparently, the book club has an interesting dynamic during discussion, because many of the students in the group are aggressive, outspoken, and strong-willed about sharing their opinions. It can be a little intimidating for some of the more soft-spoken members of the book club.

To publicize the club, librarians mention it to students who check out books for recreational reading, and they display a poster in the library with information about when the group meets and what book they are currently reading. By their own admission, the media specialists could do more to advertise, like mentioning the club in the daily announcements and reading a short selection from the current book.

In addition to library programming, some curricular activities and assignments involve recreational reading. One teacher asks her students to create an anthology of poetry or of works in a certain genre. The teacher’s intention is to expose her students to material they are not familiar with, in hopes of convincing them that “it’s not all stupid.” Also, an ESL teacher regularly requires students to read a book of their choice. The media center has a collection of ESL materials, consisting of books in simple English, that support both the curriculum and pleasure reading. This collection is also useful to other students who require simpler reading material.

The media specialists in Media Center A provide both direct and indirect readers' advisory services. They create bibliographies for fiction, myths and legends, arts (culinary and otherwise), religion, history, and biography. In addition, the library displays a series of brochures titled "Outstanding Books." These brochures feature fiction and poetry, suggestions for the college bound, and books related to ethnic groups, including books written by minorities and about Hispanic Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Some of the bibliographies are obviously geared towards the curriculum, but the lists of fiction and lists containing fiction are examples of indirect readers' advisory materials. The bibliographies are constructed from books the librarians personally recommend, in addition to suggestions included on the ALA website's listing of outstanding books.

Media Center A also lists selected new books in the library newsletter every semester. This newsletter goes to the faculty, and contains new titles that the media specialists think might be of interest to teachers. The Spring 2003 issue listed mostly nonfiction titles related to the curriculum, but fiction titles are often included as well.

In addition, the librarians at Media Center A make suggestions to students looking for a good book to read. Occasionally, they will make unsolicited recommendations. Sometimes students listen to them, sometimes they don't. More often, students come to the media center with a list of sanctioned titles from their English teachers, asking for recommendations from the list. It's rare that the students are not given a list from which to choose. Sometimes, readers' advisory conversations will begin at the circulation desk, when a student brings a book to check out. If the media specialists know the student, they will invite the student to look at the library's books or talk about a book they just

read. Although frequency is difficult to approximate, the librarians in Media Center A posit that readers' advisory interactions occur weekly.

The librarians in Media Center A recommend books to teachers occasionally, but the majority of these interactions are related to the curriculum rather than recreational reading. One media specialist characterized the behavior of teachers in the media center this way: "There are some teachers that talk about books when they come in here, but teachers don't routinely hang around and chat about books or about anything because they're busy." However, when a snow day is expected, often teachers will check out a book for pleasure reading. Administrators at School A do not check out books for recreational reading, and the librarians have not recommended books to the current administrators.

Media Center A's public relations efforts include bulletin boards, windows, new book displays, and working with the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA). The media center has windows that the librarians use for a variety of monthly displays. Currently, the windows house a combined display for women's and African American history months. One successful display involved pictures and book recommendations of teachers from when they were in high school. The teachers wrote a review of a book they liked when they were in high school, and the librarians displayed those books near the window. Future plans include a window with the catchy theme "Sex, Drugs, and Rock'n'Roll." They have also designed a poetry window that includes student poetry. Curriculum and school related displays include graduation, Hispanics, Native Americans, ESL students' posters about their home countries, and people of the world. Sometimes

art classes will display their artwork in the windows. In addition, new books are always on display.

In the past, the media specialists have worked with the PTSA through their newsletter to encourage book donations; each donated item is dedicated to the donor. Previously, the PTSA has sponsored a book fair and donated the proceeds to the library. This has not happened as much recently, though, because no local company is willing to sponsor such a book sale. In addition, the PTSA often prefers to contribute to the school in “flashy” ways, such as providing funding for new computers.

Media Center A has a website, but it does not include anything related to recreational reading. The website contains information about the library’s technology, collection, services, and staff, in addition to links to internet reference sources and university and public libraries in the surrounding areas.

The media specialists at Library A seemed to lament the fact that their students are not reading recreationally as much as they used to. They cited the increases in testing and meeting curriculum requirements as affecting recreational reading. This feeling is captured in this statement: “...reading is at the core of everything we do in this building, but so much emphasis is on testing, and test data, and test results, and reading for the sake of reading, I think, is not stressed as much as maybe it once was.” Teachers are not assigning as many outside reading assignments as they used to, because they are paying attention to the Standard Course of Study now. Some Advanced Placement (AP) classes still read novels, but since the reading is for class, it is not truly recreational reading. Another change associated with the advent of testing is that students are given more lists from which to choose their reading; they have less freedom in their reading choices for

class assignments. In addition, School A has implemented a vocabulary program through the English department. The intent is to help students recognize word parts to increase reading recognition in all subject areas, and teachers have reported that their students are better able to read their texts since the implementation of this program. Although the vocabulary program may also increase reading ability in reading for pleasure, the media specialists cite it as another element of the curriculum that has taken the place of recreational reading.

Media Center A librarians express some cynicism about the role of recreational reading at their school. While they “believe that [recreational reading] should be the number one goal,” they also “know that once you walk out of this room, that’s probably not what’s happening out there.” The librarians also compared the time restrictions of the high school to the less constrained environment in the elementary schools.

If Media Center A had unlimited resources, its staff would like to implement additional programming to promote recreational reading, including author visits, booktalks, and lunch programs. Currently, the media specialists would like to do booktalks, but teachers don’t have the time. If the rules about eating in the library were suspended, lunch activities might allow students to bring their lunches to the media center to eat and read. Or, lunches could be combined with author visits, allowing students to eat lunch with visiting authors. School A has two lunch periods, which would complicate lunchtime programming.

The librarians at Media Center A feel that money is not the main issue in promoting recreational reading. They believe that the situation could be improved if schools placed more “emphasis on creativity and individuality in students rather than [on]

everyone learning the same facts for the SCS tests.” One media specialist continued: “I think testing has stifled our kids.” Also, students are often surprised to find fiction in their school library. However, the media specialists noted that teenagers can find a more extensive collection at the public library, and often more risqué books. Media Center A is quite careful in their selection of books; before selection, the staff asks if they could defend the book if a parent were to be offended or upset by any selection.

Media Center B

The media specialist at Media Center B has made recreational reading a high priority for her library. As part of the school improvement plan, faculty set goals for each year and report on their success in meeting those goals. After mentioning the time constraints her students face, she claimed “certainly we do spend a lot of time with children encouraging the students with recreational reading.” The media specialist mentioned the difference between the reading habits of high school and middle school students, realizing that high school students are involved in “rigorous academic schedule[s] here at school,” some of them play sports, and many have access to video games and computers, leaving less time for reading.

When asked about the role of recreational reading in a high school library, Media Specialist B responded: “I think everybody should be reading all the time.” In her reports to the school governance committee about her goals with regards to recreational reading, she has discussed some of the work done by Stephen Krashen, whose research has shown that recreational reading can result in increased test scores. The media specialist has educated her colleagues on the importance of recreational reading as it relates to academic achievement and learning. The media specialist’s efforts to increase

recreational reading programming and to share reading research with the school community have helped increase recreational reading among the students.

Recreational reading programming is ongoing at Media Center B. In the past, contests were sponsored during National Library Week, but this year, the media center has extended the contests throughout the year. Each month, there is a theme, upon which displays and contests are centered. During the time of our interview, the theme was women's history month, which was highlighted in a display near the front of the library. The library was sponsoring two contests related to women's history month: a word search puzzle with famous women and a brief questionnaire with multiple choice questions. Past themes have included science fiction, mysteries, transportation, tearjerkers, sports, video games, and a variety of topics that the media staff feel are of interest to students. The media center staff try to choose themes in which the library has a good selection of books. In addition to the contests and displays, there is a small item at the circulation desk related to the theme that is intended "to pique their interest" in the contest. For women's history, it was a calendar that reported historical events on each day of the month. In the past, this has included cartoons. Often the contest prizes are related to the theme. For example, when the theme was tearjerkers, the prizes were movie tickets. The library buys the prizes itself.

One of the goals of the contest is for students to look through the catalog in search of answers. When the theme was tearjerkers, many of the questions involved romance novels. If students are "smart enough and bright enough," they will turn to the catalog to look at summaries of romance novels to help them answer the contest questions. Then,

as they are reading the summaries, the students might find a book that sounds good to them.

Contests include puzzles and matching tasks. The contests are designed to include both easy and difficult questions, some that might require a student to look at the books on display or look in the catalog. Students can pick up the contest forms at the end of the circulation desk at any time during the month, and they are due to the library by the end of month. The winners are announced over the public announcement (PA) system, as well as included in the daily written announcements. “We make a big deal about it,” the media specialist noted.

The ongoing contests are new this school year. Approximately 20-30 students participate in the contests every month, and the media specialist observed that “every month we have more and more kids that participate.” The contests are advertised in the daily written announcements, the announcements over the PA system after lunch, and in the marquee in the commons area.

In the past, Media Center B has invited authors to come and speak to the students, although no authors have visited this year or last year. The media specialist mentioned that popular young adult author Sarah Dessen was the last to visit.

Media Center B integrates recreational reading into its teaching program as well. In the past three years, the media specialist’s goals for the school improvement plan have involved targeting certain grade levels, and getting teachers to bring their classes to the library for a recreational reading project. The first year, the media specialist asked all the 9th grade English teachers to bring their classes to the library once during the school year to select any book they wanted to read, with no consequences or assignments attached.

The teacher and the library staff make suggestions. Describing this program, the media specialist remarked that “for a lot of the teachers, because of their schedules, there have been assignments that go along with that reading ... they’ve still been willing to let the kids read anything at all.” This year, the media specialist added the 10th grade teachers to her goals, and has found it more difficult to manage both groups. She finds it easier to work with younger students and their teachers, because they are more willing to give her time. However, the media specialist has had to convince some teachers who are more reluctant. Speaking about their time constraints, she noted the six days of school missed this year because of snow and ice. Further, she mentioned that “because of testing, there’s lots of pressure to stay with the curriculum [so] that they’re not always willing to give me time to spend with kids.”

In addition to English teachers, the media specialist works with reading teachers and English as a second language teachers. Both sets of teachers bring their students to the library regularly. The library has a collection of fiction in Spanish, which the ESL students use. The media specialist at Media Center B finds that continual reminders to the teachers that “I’m here and that I’m willing to spend time with their kids” helps teachers feel welcome and willing to bring their classes to the library.

The media specialist at Media Center B does readers’ advisory in person with students, teachers, and administrators, in addition to providing indirect readers’ advisory materials. As she highlights in library orientation, the media center keeps bibliographies for each fiction area at the circulation desk, which “kids use ... all the time.” In addition, every fiction book in the library has been annotated in the media center catalog. The media staff at School B write these annotations using the book jacket summary and

paging through the book; this represents a major time commitment. For teachers and administrators, the library constructs a summer reading list that is a couple of pages long. The books on this list are books the media staff has read or books from booklists on the Internet. The media specialist is always looking for books to include.

A couple of times a day, the media specialist suggests books to students. This readers' advisory takes place in several ways. Sometimes students will approach the media specialist and specifically ask for suggestions, and other times the media specialist will mention a book if she sees a student she knows. In fact, the media specialist feels that building relationships with the students is crucial to media center work, particularly with recreational reading. There are over 1500 students at School B, and she feels that the better the media staff know the students and their reading tastes, the better able they are to suggest books that the students might enjoy. Describing this aspect of her work, the media specialist remarked: "I think that's a really important part that people don't talk about, these relationships that we make, that allow us to come into a high school kid's world. They're not always willing to let us into that world." Readers' advisory conversations also occur at the circulation desk or at book displays, where the media staff might say: "I have something else like that."

The media specialist also advises teachers and administrators about recreational reading. In particular, she is familiar with the principal's reading interests, and regularly suggests books to him. A former English teacher, the media specialist describes him as an "avid reader." Email facilitates readers' advisory services with teachers and administrators, "because it's so easy to quickly communicate with people, and everybody reads their email here at school."

Booktalks, bulletin boards, and the media center website form the core of public relations activities at Media Center B. The media specialist approaches teachers to ask for a few minutes to do some booktalks, and then takes no more than 10-15 minutes. She is careful to stick to the agreed upon time, so that teachers will ask her to come back. Sometimes teachers will suggest a genre or theme that their students might be interested in, and sometimes the media specialist selects books independently. Media Specialist B reported that 9th and 10th grade teachers are more willing to listen to booktalks. She speculates that teachers of higher grades “think that their kids are not as interested.” After the booktalks, the books are set aside at the circulation desk, where students can check them out.

The Media Center B website has two sections with book reviews, intended for recreational reading. The “Reading for Relaxation” section lists reviews for 10 works of fiction, and the “Read to Learn” section lists reviews for 10 works of nonfiction. The annotations are more extensive than those that appear in the library catalog, and they are written by library staff as well. The reviews are updated monthly.

Several collection features encourage recreational reading as well. High interest books are displayed on a revolving rack. The media center has a book exchange, in addition to collections of graphic novels and Spanish materials. The materials in the book exchange are not part of the regular media center collection, and students can take whatever they want as long as they bring in another book. Following the recent popularity of graphic novels, the media center’s collection of these books “has been really successful for kids who generally are not into reading. They will at least pick up a

graphic novel.” The collection of Spanish language fiction appeals to the increasing number of Hispanic students at School B.

With unlimited resources, Media Center B would like to increase its recreational reading programming. In addition to increasing author visits, the media specialist would like to implement a program similar to the public library “One Book, One City” programs, in which everyone in the school would read the same book.

Media Center C

Media Center C is somewhat different from the others in the study, because the media specialist is in her third year, and she has made a lot of changes to the library in her short time there. Describing her first impressions of recreational reading in the library, she noted “our fiction collection was weak, and my first year, there seemed to be little recreational reading going on.” During the past three years, the media specialist has strengthened the fiction collection, and has great plans for increasing recreational reading activities in her media center.

The motivation behind the media specialist’s plans for increasing recreational reading at School C is her belief in the power of reading. She believes that school media centers should have both fiction and nonfiction collections that support recreational reading because increased reading results in such benefits as “vocabulary enhancement, the use of language, the ideas they’ve never been exposed to before, the provocation of thought, debate.” Her attitude about recreational reading is evident in this statement: “I don’t care what you’re reading, if you just read read read read read.” The media specialist has also been improving her academic collection, mentioning that in her first

year she replaced science encyclopedias from the 1980s. However, she always reserves some part of the budget for recreational reading materials.

To develop the recreational reading collection at Media Center C, the media specialist asked students to recommend books for the library by way of a suggestion box. Therefore, “the population of students that are doing the most recreational reading are the ones who have asked for particular books and have gotten them.” Science fiction and fantasy are popular genres at School C, as well as series like *Otherworld* and books by Lorraine McDaniels. Other popular books include materials about sports figures and teams, celebrities, and musicians. One student repeatedly requested a book about the musical group Hanson, for example. In the 9th grade, a common assignment is the simple biographical report. If the students are allowed to choose the subject of this assignment, they are more likely to return to the library for more books about this person.

The media specialist described several categories of readers at her media center: “There are some students who are going to come to the library and check out books and read incessantly if you don’t lift a finger. They’re the type that love to hang around and talk about books, and ask for recommendations...” On the other hand, she noted, many honors students “have too much school work to do to read for pleasure much.” Some students have mentioned to the media specialist that they read recreationally in the summer, finding books at the public library.

In addition, she surveyed students to determine what magazines they were interested in. Media Center C has an extensive collection of magazines, although when the media specialist started, the collection consisted mostly of periodicals of low interest to high school students, such as *House Beautiful* and *Southern Living*. After conducting

the survey, the media specialist added titles of interest to her students, such as *Skateboarding*, *Vibe*, *Rolling Stone*, *4-Wheel*, *Spin*, and *Threads*. This modification has resulted in increased magazine reading at lunch, particularly among the boys. Indeed, when describing this project, the media specialist stated: “I think at this point the thing that has promoted recreational reading the most has been the change in the magazine collection. That’s something that I widely promoted, advertised, marketed...”

The active Parent Teacher Student Association at School C has also helped the collection grow. In the past few years, the PTSA has focused their funding efforts on college preparatory materials for the media center. In addition, there is a group of women who donate the proceeds of the county thrift shop to the school library, sometimes suggesting books they would like to see added to the media center collection. Often, they are willing to let the media specialist spend that money on recreational reading.

As yet, the media specialist has not had time to implement any reading incentive programs. The media specialist feels that she needs to have a better collection before she can begin programming. Last year, some students approached her about starting a book club, but it only lasted a semester. She mentioned a recent media services meeting with all the media specialists in the county, in which they discussed how reading promotion activities are so much more prevalent at the elementary and middle school levels, as opposed to the high school level. However, there are teachers who bring their classes to the library to pick out books for recreational reading. In particular, lower level classes visit the library once a month for a fun book to read. The media specialist stated that “the only teachers who bring kids to the library to check out recreational reading are the

remedial reading teachers.” When high level classes come to the library, the librarian often discusses books in terms of literary criticism or whatever assignment the class has been given. When classes visit the media center, the librarian will construct annotated bibliographies related to the class project. When teachers let students choose their books, recreational reading is encouraged. One example of this involved a student who “fell in love with Kurt Vonnegut” while working on a literary criticism paper. The media specialist continued: “We right now don’t have as many of his books as we’d like, so I ended bringing all my own from home.” Clearly, Media Specialist C is dedicated to serving the students at her school.

Readers’ advisory services at Media Center C include both print reference sources and personal suggestions from the librarian. The media specialist subscribes to several professional journals, including *Library Journal* and *Booklist*, that help her become familiar with new fiction to recommend to her students. As part of its professional collection, the media center also has a series of readers’ advisory reference tools, including all of the Genreflecting books and others that include read-alike lists. Although these books are kept behind the circulation desk, students know that they are welcome to use them. Often, the media specialist will direct students to online booklists and readers’ advisory tools.

The media specialist also constructs a list of all the new materials at the library, both nonfiction and fiction, for teachers and students. She writes one-line annotations for recreational reading books, and when she distributes the list, she asks teachers to promote those books she has annotated. This list is also posted in the library for students to

peruse. Citing her busy schedule, she stated “I’d like to do [an annotated] list twice a year, but I haven’t had time.”

The media specialist at School C loves to recommend books to her students. Describing this interaction, she remarked, “once I find out particularly what a student likes, if I get anything in, I’ll seek out the student and tell them.” Also, she learns about books from the students themselves, in conversations about books. The media specialist estimates that there are approximately 12 students who come to her regularly for suggestions about what to read. Sometimes, she suggests new genres to avid readers. The media specialist described one such example this way: “I had a girl last year who loves to read young adult books about girls and girlfriends and friendship and all that and sisters I finally got her turned on to Jane Austen. And she loved her, she loves her!” Other students have requested reading lists, to prepare for college. The media specialist noted that for some students, this is recreational reading, but for others, it is an attempt to get ahead academically.

Media Specialist C also uses movies as a hook for readers. She mentioned that she will tell students to watch a certain movie, and when the students come back to her, she gives them the book. For example, the media specialist has suggested the movie *Clueless* to her students, and then given them Jane Austen’s book *Emma*, the story upon which the movie is based. She finds this particular hook very useful because the movie “contextualizes it so the language isn’t as hard for them.” Other groups in the school have also used movies as a hook. The media specialist noted that honor societies and language clubs have shown movies and then recommended the students read either the

book from which the movie was taken or a book related to the movie in some way. The media center sees increased circulation from these events.

In addition, there are a few teachers to whom she continually makes recreational reading suggestions. “Whenever I read anything either a review of something that sounds really good or even something I’ve read, I really promote it to the teachers.” The media specialist estimates that there are six teachers who regularly approach her and ask for recommendations, and probably 12 more to whom she gives unsolicited recommendations.

Media Specialist C believes that a good relationship with her students is the most important public relations activity she is involved in. “Being liked by the kids when the classes come in ... will bring them in after school and during lunch.” Similarly, she tries to make the library an inviting place; the media specialist does not require absolute quiet in her media center because she feels that libraries are “a place to talk about ideas.” The media center staff members allow their student aides to read when they have a few spare minutes, and the media specialist enjoys it when students get comfortable in the library. She relayed a charming story about a tall boy who would lay down on the couches in the library, “one leg ... hanging off the side.” The media specialist believes that when students see their peers comfortably reading in the library, it attracts them to come. “If a student were to come in during lunch and plop on the floor to read, that’s fine with us, because it’s there, this is the place to come.”

When she first came to School C, the media specialist distributed a brochure to staff, teachers, and students about the library and the new librarian. This public relations

effort attracted several members of the cafeteria staff to the media center, and now they regularly check out books for their own recreational reading.

Other public relations endeavors include activity in the PTSA, doing booktalks, modeling reading, and creating bulletin boards and other displays. The media specialist works closely with the PTSA to purchase materials for the library. Describing the success of doing booktalks with her students, the media specialist remarked “booktalks at the high school level still work beautifully.” The media specialist also models reading for her students. Sometimes, she will take a book (her genre of choice is mystery) to lunch. When lunch ends, she is so involved in the story that she walks down the hall reading, and the students comment on her behavior, asking what is so interesting that she might fall and break a leg on her walk back to the media center. She commented, “That’s good that they see me with my nose in a book.”

Like many other libraries, Media Center C creates displays to promote recreational reading. A popular display in the past has consisted of artifacts from around the world, loaned to the media center by teachers and students. The librarian combines the artifacts with related multicultural fiction and nonfiction, and students “spend a long time examining” these displays. Remarking on the success of displays such as these, the media specialist mentioned that circulation for multicultural fiction increases during promotional displays.

Currently, Media Center C does not have a website, although the media specialist is working with a group of students to develop the site. Website plans include student book reviews, which the media specialist will change and update every month. One of the business teachers assigns a project where students create an online review of a book

they have read for fun, using various web design tools. The media specialist hopes to include these reviews on the website, which she plans to get online before next year begins.

The media specialist at School C discussed the effects of testing on recreational reading. At the time of the interview, 10th graders were in the middle of a testing round. In the space of one month, the students had to take 3 state-sponsored standardized tests. She spoke of the challenges teachers face in trying to motivate their students to stay on task in the classroom, to say nothing of encouraging recreational reading when “they’re being tested, tested, tested out the wazoo.” Media Specialist C worked as a classroom teacher before she became a librarian, and she mentioned that before End of Course (EOC) testing was instituted, she would allow students to read while they were waiting for their classmates to finish a test or project. Her own teaching practices confirmed her statement that “I don’t think that’s happening any more because I think every minute is focused again for rehearsing, preparing, reiterating the skills for the test.” After EOCs were introduced, she would give students reviews to work on when they finished early. The media specialist also discussed the academic rigor at School C, particularly in Advanced Placement and Honors courses. She concluded that “the trend toward increased testing does cut down on the ability of the classroom teacher to promote recreational reading and cuts then into the library as well.”

Media Specialist C also commented on the connection between creative writing and recreational reading. “A lot of the desire to [write creatively] comes from reading recreationally poetry or fiction.” Creative writing is not taught anymore, and the media specialist believes this may be a factor in decreasing recreational reading.

The media specialist at School C was thrilled to consider the possibilities of what she would do for recreational reading with unlimited resources. First, she would plan renovations for the library, creating comfortable, inviting spaces for students to read and for groups to talk about what they read. She described it this way: “I would create a section of the library that was designed for kids to sprawl and spread, with the type of furniture, and the type of lighting.” Also, she would like to reorganize the fiction collection. Currently, it is in alphabetical order by the author’s last name, but she would like to arrange it differently. She would initiate topical book clubs for students. The media specialist would educate the students in her school about different fiction genres, and conduct school-wide surveys to determine the reading interests of her students. Using the results of this survey, she would devote hours and hours to searching and buying recreational reading material, involving students in the order process.

Media Specialist C would also hire either another assistant or another full-time librarian. She imagined that she would turn over all the paperwork, except for selection, to the new staff member and “devote myself completely to instruction and promotion of recreational reading.” One of the things she would enjoy about this arrangement is that she wouldn’t “have to run to rooms and fix people’s computers, to not worry about the TVs and the overheads.” She noted the difficulties of supporting technology without a trained staff member. “I’m not a computer technician; I may be an information specialist, but that’s retrieval, not hardware.” The media specialist also talked about how her instruction could be expanded. She could approach teachers with her ideas and offer to take half of the class for more specialized instruction in projects related to recreational reading.

With unlimited resources, the media specialist would also like to increase the displays in the media center. She has talked with the art teacher about displaying student artwork that promotes reading, but has not had the time to finalize the project.

Media Center D

Media Center D is also involved in promoting recreational reading among its students. The media specialist believes that Media Center D provides a good example of what the role of recreational reading in a school should be, albeit citing busy schedules and extracurricular activities as limiting the number of students who read. “The older they get the more involved they become in their studies and jobs and their social lives, and reading sometimes takes a back seat.” However, there are students at School D who “love to read inherently,” who check out books from the media center for their own enjoyment.

One of the largest programming efforts at Media Center D usually occurs during National Library Week. The highlight of the week’s activities includes an author or speaker, with contests and other activities, both fun and serious, throughout the week. The theme for this year is “Focus on Fantasy,” and plans include a UNC professor who used to be a student of Tolkien and a sword play group. The media specialist also considered a lunchtime demonstration of the Lord of the Rings card game as well as inviting an expert on medieval weaponry to talk about costuming. Including Harry Potter and other popular fantasy books will draw more students to participate. Previous themes have included North Carolina writers, and popular young adult author Sarah Dessen came to speak. One year, National Library Week coincided with National Poetry Week, so the

guest was local African American poet, Jaki Shelton Green. The media specialist tries to tie the theme to the curriculum in some way.

The National Library Week contests are designed to appeal to many levels of participation. Some are easy, like word jumbles and crossword puzzles, whereas others are more challenging, such as trivia contests. When the theme was North Carolina writers, the contests included author/title matching and identifying authors from pictures on a bulletin board. Approximately 150 students participate in National Library Week activities. Beforehand, the librarian promotes the week in a variety of English classes, taking a poster displaying a picture of the speaker and possibly some of their book covers with her to get the kids excited about the upcoming events and the prizes. The prizes usually include movie tickets and bookstore gift certificates. For this year's Focus on Fantasy activities, the prizes will include life-size cutouts of characters from the Lord of the Rings movies and a Lord of the Rings movie soundtrack CD.

The media center also gives two special prizes. One prize is given to the student who has checked out the most books from the media center during the school year; the restaurant, Red Hot and Blue, has donated gift certificates for the winner of this cleverly named "Pig Out" prize. If students return items and pay overdue fines during National Library Week, their names are entered in a drawing for \$20 cash.

Another tradition at School D involves programming for teachers during National Library Week—a breakfast and two drawings. Teachers who check out items for their own recreational reading or who bring their classes to the media center during the school year are entered into drawings, and the winners receive Barnes and Noble gift

certificates. Local businesses also donate the food for the teacher breakfast sponsored by Media Center D.

Although not sponsored by Media Center D, there is a teacher book club at the school. The club was founded by an English teacher, but currently it is maintained by the secretary in the counseling office. Approximately 10 teachers attend regularly, and individual teachers will suggest books for the group to read, or they will read in genres. This year, the club read some Steinbeck, since it was the 100th anniversary of his birthday. The media specialist is a member of the book club, and often brings materials to share with teachers, reviews, or booklists from professional library journals.

Media Center D also integrates recreational reading into the library curriculum. The media specialist actively encourages teachers to come to the library for reading projects. When asked how many teachers she does these curriculum-related recreational reading projects with, the media specialist replied: “They’re with whichever teachers I can talk into doing them.” Two 10th grade world literature projects exist, one for an honors level class, and one for regular level students. Honors students come to the library to select a novel by a foreign author, and return several weeks later to learn about literary criticism. Some students are given an assignment which involves writing a letter to the author, agreeing or disagreeing with the criticism they read. At the regular level, the criteria are slightly relaxed, in that students can choose books that are set in a foreign country. Their assignments involve a variety of projects, including book reviews and multicultural projects involving the book and the country the story is set in.

Some 9th grade classes come to the library for a recreational reading activity. Before the class comes to the library, the media specialist sets books on display; often,

these are from “best books for young adults” booklists. When the class comes in, the media specialist demonstrates the readers’ advisory database NoveList. The students choose three books they are interested in, and then they read each book for 10 minutes. They record their first responses to the books, and check out the book that seems the most appealing. Their task is to write book reviews. In the 11th grade, some English classes come to the library for instruction about literary criticism of American writers. Also, a couple of teachers do a multicultural project in American literature, requiring students to read a book by an American minority, such as Asian Americans or a Hispanic American.

Approximately two teachers per grade do recreational reading projects, and they bring five classes each. There are approximately 25 students per class, which means that 750 students are involved in recreational reading classroom projects at School D.

Readers’ advisory at Media Center D is strong. Last year, the media specialist began creating a brochure for students called “Novel Ideas,” consisting of annotations for approximately 10 novels. The media specialist would like to do a new “Novel Ideas” brochure every quarter, but has averaged one per semester. In addition, the library often has bookmarks highlighting young adult authors. In the biannual library newsletter for teachers, there is a section devoted to fiction, also called “Novel Ideas.” Sometimes this consists of a list of new fiction in the library, and sometimes it highlights a few novels with annotations. The media specialist demonstrates NoveList to the English department teachers as well. In addition to providing reading suggestions based on characteristics of a book, this database contains ideas for activities that can be used to promote reading.

Library staff members regularly suggest books to students. The media specialist estimated that she has “a conversation with a student about a book of their own choice

about five times a week.” Sometimes students ask for recommendations, and sometimes the staff will suggest books of their own volition. The media specialist also suggests books to teachers, in the teacher book club and when they visit the library. These conversations occur approximately two times per week. Often the teachers will peruse the new book shelves for ideas.

Public relations efforts in Media Center D involve display areas and daily interactions with the school community. An artistic and creative parent volunteer helps put together the bulletin boards, which are displayed for 4-6 weeks. The media specialist and the volunteer work together, bouncing ideas off each other. At the time of the interview, the display was about black baseball leagues, for African-American history month. Other themes have included mystery, fantasy, poetry, and “whatever we can think of.” New books are displayed near the front door of the library, and books are also displayed on the tops of shelves throughout the library.

The media specialist at Media Center D is involved in public relations activities every day. For example, at the time of the interview, she was planning to lead an orientation for student teachers about the librarian’s role in classroom teaching. Media specialist D has done booktalks in the past, but doesn’t do them now.

Media Center D’s website has two sections that relate to recreational reading. The online readers’ advisory database NoveList is linked from the website, and one web page is dedicated to student book reviews. On March 29, 2003, there were 58 book reviews posted, each a couple of paragraphs long. Students describe a variety of books, including classics such as *1984* and *A Farewell to Arms*, as well as popular books like J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* and Stephen King’s *Cujo*. Most of

the reviews are products of several 9th grade class projects, in which students can choose any book they would like to read and then write a book review. The reviews are updated two or three times a year, when the media specialist receives them from teachers. In addition, the librarian requests that her student assistants in the media center write a review every nine weeks.

Given unlimited financial and temporal resources, the media specialist at Media Center D would like to work more with teachers, as well as institute some organized programs involving student reading. Citing school size as a problem, the media specialist expressed herself this way: "I'd like to have more time to work with my teachers. But we have such a large school that it's really, really difficult to do that. Basically you find the ones that are most willing to collaborate, and you work with them as much as you can." Currently, the media specialist focuses her efforts with 9th and 10th grade teachers in an attempt to help the students feel comfortable coming to the library. In particular, the media specialist would like to increase the number of teachers who come to the library for a free choice book project.

Media specialist D posits that the increased use of computers has affected students' need for recreational reading. In particular, computers have affected magazine reading among students at School D. Before school and at lunchtime are popular times for magazine reading, but some of the students that used to read magazines now choose to use computers instead.

Recreational reading at Media Center D also changes with the new group of students that enter the school each year. Last year, there was a large contingent of fantasy readers in the 9th grade, and the library attempted to meet this need by buying

more fantasy books. However, this year's freshman class is not as interested in fantasy. In fact, this year's National Library Week fantasy program at Media Center D is an attempt to "get those fantasy readers stirred up again this year." Reading tastes change every year, and they are difficult to predict.

With more time, Media Center D would also like to start a book club for students. A student book group existed about four years ago, but the media specialist feels that it served more of a social purpose. "I think the student's real need was a need for a group more so than the actual reading." The student-run group met in a room adjacent to the library during lunch, which is a very busy time for the media specialist. At first, the group was organized, but it became a social group instead of a book club. If she could have more time, then the media specialist would like to sponsor organized activities related to student reading.

Discussion

It is evident from the media specialists' comments about recreational reading that they each feel it should have a place in their media centers. Indeed, this feeling is converted into reality in the media centers in this study. Each school media center represents a unique environment, in which a variety of activities related to recreational reading take place. It is significant that recreational reading has a role in each media center in the study, although the size, importance, and implementation of this role are different for each school. Some activities and attitudes overlap, whereas others stand out as distinctive.

Media centers sponsor similar programs for their students, including themed contests and author visits. Two schools regularly host contests related to various themes,

which include fiction genres. The media centers offer similar prizes, including movie tickets and gift certificates. Interestingly, these two schools are in the same school district. In addition, these same two schools either coordinate author visits or have done so in the past. It is evident that contests and author visits are popular ways to encourage recreational reading, for they were also discussed often in the literature.

Although only one school media center is running a book club currently, two mentioned that they had had student book clubs in the past. Intriguingly, students initiated the formation of all the book clubs. Perhaps this reflects both the current popularity of book clubs nationwide and the developmental characteristics of young adults, who are developing independence and identity. One school has a book club for teachers, although it is not sponsored by the media center. Other media specialists mentioned that they would like to start book clubs when asked about their plans if given unlimited resources. The “one book, one school” idea is a form of a book club, too. Book clubs are another popular activity for promoting recreational reading in high school media centers.

Recreational reading projects related to the curriculum are done in all four media centers. In two libraries, media specialists recruit teachers to do the projects, whereas in the other two schools, teachers initiate class visits to the library for recreational reading projects. The projects are quite varied, although it was interesting to note that in two schools, English as a Second Language students regularly come to the library to check out material for recreational reading. Indeed, this fits with the school where remedial reading classes also come for recreational reading. Research has shown that voluntary reading for fun leads to increased reading ability. Another common theme in curricular

projects was that they tended to be done by the younger grades more than the older grades. Perhaps curriculum demands are stronger at higher grades, leaving less time for recreational reading.

Readers' advisory services were also common. At all four schools, indirect readers' advisory resources included bibliographies, and at three schools, these lists are annotated. Reference tools were available at two schools, at one a collection of readers' advisory books and at the other the database NoveList. One distinctive method involved a summer reading list of young adult fiction for teachers and administrators. At all four schools, the media specialists regularly suggest books to their students. Media specialists at two schools estimated that they have readers' advisory conversations daily, whereas the others did not suggest books as often. In addition, at three schools, media specialists recommend books to teachers and administrators. In one case, the principal is an avid reader, and perhaps his enthusiasm for reading sets the tone for recreational reading at his school. At one school, however, the media center reported that teachers are too busy, and seemed surprised at the idea of engaging in readers' advisory with their administration in particular.

All the media centers participate in public relations efforts, as well. Bulletin boards and displays were created by each media specialist, and the themes for displays were commonly focused on different genres or minority histories. It is notable that one school integrated displays with monthly contests. Also, several media specialists mentioned displaying new materials on a popular new books shelf. Media specialists at two schools are involved in their PTSA organizations, helping to coordinate the organizations' donations to the media center. Media specialists at two schools give

booktalks. Two media center websites address recreational reading by providing book reviews, written by students in one case. Another media center has plans to include student book reviews on its website. One media specialist used unusual methods of public relations, including modeling reading to her students, creating an inviting atmosphere, and by sending a brochure to students, parents, teachers, and staff.

Intriguingly, two media specialists mentioned the importance of building relationships with the students. One noted this when discussing readers' advisory, whereas the other considers it public relations. Getting to know the students and earning their trust plays a large role in the media centers of these two schools. Other media specialists probably engage in this activity, too, but maybe do not think of it in terms of readers' advisory or public relations. The more librarians know about their students and their reading tastes, the better able they are to suggest books.

It is also interesting to note the comments the media specialists made about educational trends that have affected recreational reading in recent years. In particular, the increase of testing requirements, more prevalent use of technology, and student schedule constraints were cited as reducing recreational reading promotion activities in the school. Media specialists at three schools mentioned testing as inhibiting recreational reading activities, and media specialists at two schools spoke repeatedly about the pressure testing places on both students and teachers. Considering the research about the effects of recreational reading on reading comprehension and academic achievement, perhaps it is unwise for school systems to lose time devoted to voluntary, fun reading. One media specialist noted that computers have taken the place of magazine reading for some of her students. Three media specialists mentioned the busy schedules of their

students as reducing the amount of recreational reading they do, and these observations confirm assertions made in the literature.

Conclusion and Future Research

People who worry about the future of reading in the United States might do well to find hope in the case studies presented here. Clearly, recreational reading plays an important role in these media centers. Media specialists looking for ideas for promoting reading will find successful models in the examples of the media centers in this study. These four schools in North Carolina demonstrate recreational reading programming, readers' advisory, and public relations activities that other school libraries could implement. If the media specialists interviewed are indicative of a general trend, it is obvious that school librarians remain dedicated to promoting recreational reading. In addition, each librarian mentioned students that recreationally read fiction, nonfiction, and magazines from the school media center.

Currently, many public libraries provide extensive services and collections for young adults, meeting a variety of needs for information, education, and recreation. Young adult programming at public libraries often includes book groups and poetry slams, and readers' advisory services include reference sources, booklists, and suggestions from librarians. Indeed, some overlap exists between the recreational reading activities at the four schools in this study and those at public libraries. Partnerships between public libraries and school media centers might provide an exciting avenue to combine resources and expand current programs for promoting recreational reading among young adults.

However, because this study focused on four high schools, it is impossible to generalize conclusions to larger groups of media centers, media specialists, or students. More extensive studies of media center practices and attitudes towards recreational reading would help elucidate the state of reading promotion in high school libraries. In addition, this study relied solely on the media specialist for information; future research could incorporate observation and student, teacher, and other library staff interviews. Indeed, there are many other factors that could affect recreational reading that have not been addressed here. Funding level, school and regional culture, and administration attitudes could affect recreational reading. Also, it would be interesting to examine student achievement as related to the role of recreational reading in the school media center. High school seems different from primary education in that students read less due to busy academic and extracurricular schedules; however, it would also be intriguing to compare the role of recreational reading across elementary, middle, and high schools. Answers to these questions will continue to shed light on the current state of recreational reading in school media centers.

References

- Bull, Sandra. 1989. Strategies to Surmount Lost Causes: A Cautionary Tale about Young Adult Programming. *Texas Libraries* 50 (Spring): 30-33.
- Carlson, Chris and Chris Sherman. 2000. Celebrate Reading: a Literature Festival for the Whole Community. *Voice of Youth Advocates* 23 no. 5 (Dec): 328-330.
- Craver, Kathleen W. 1994. *School Library Media Centers in the 21st Century: Changes and Challenges*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Erikson, Erik. 1993. *Childhood and Society*. Rev. ed. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Gallik, Jude D. 1999. Do They Read for Pleasure? Recreational Reading Habits of College Students. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 42 (March): 480-488.
- Glover, Lucy Ann. 1992. On Moving a Heavy Novel. *The Book Report* 10 (Jan/Feb): 14-15.
- Gold Star Ideas. 1992. *The Book Report* 10 (Jan/Feb): 21-26.
- Gomberg, Karen Cornell. 1987. *Books Appeal: Get Teenagers into the School Library*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Gordon, Anita. 2002. Helping Students Find Their Voices. *The Book Report* 20 no. 4 (Nov/Dec): 32.
- Krashen, Stephen. 2002a. What Do We Know About Libraries and Reading Achievement? *The Book Report* 20 (Jan/Feb): 38.
- Krashen, Stephen. 2002b. Whole Language and the Great Plummet of 1987-92. *Phi Delta Kappan* 83 (June): 748-753.
- Krashen, Stephen. 2001a. Do Teenagers Like to Read? Yes!. *Reading Today* 18 (Apr/May): 16.
- Krashen, Stephen. 2001b. More Smoke and Mirrors: A Critique of the National Reading Panel Report on Fluency. *Phi Delta Kappan* 83 (Oct): 119-123.
- Krashen, Stephen. 1995. School Libraries, Public Libraries, and the NAEP Reading Scores. *School Library Media Quarterly* 23 (Summer): 235-237.
- Krashen, Stephen. 1989. We Acquire Vocabulary and Spelling by Reading: Additional Evidence for the Input Hypothesis. *The Modern Language Journal* 73: 440-464.

- Lance, Keith Curry. 1994. The Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement. *School Library Media Annual* 12: 188-197.
- Maxwell, D. Jackson. 2000. Judging Books By Their Covers. *The Book Report* 19 no. 4 (Nov/Dec): 30.
- McQuillan, Jeff and Julie Au. 2001. The Effect of Print Access on Reading Frequency. *Reading Psychology* 22: 225-248.
- McQuillan, Jeff. 1998. *The Literary Crisis: False Claims, Real Solutions*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.
- Mitchell, Connie. 1992. Once Upon a Time... : An Examination of the Decline in Recreational Reading as Students Progress through School. *Indiana Media Journal* 15 (Fall): 54-78.
- Morrow, Lesley Manuel and Carol Simon Weinstein. 1986. Encouraging Voluntary Reading: the Impact of a Literature Program on Children's Use of Library Centers. *Reading Research Quarterly* 11 (Summer): 330-346.
- Pilgreen, Janice and Stephen Krashen. 1993. Sustained Silent Reading with English as a Second Language High School Students: Impact on Reading Comprehension, Reading Frequency, and Reading Enjoyment. *School Library Media Quarterly* 22 (Fall): 21-23.
- Ramos, Francisco and Stephen Krashen. 1998. The Impact of One Trip to the Public Library: Making Books Available May Be the Best Incentive for Reading. *The Reading Teacher* 51 (April): 614-615.
- Raymer, Anne. 1992. The Middle Graders' Connection. *School Library Journal* 38 (May): 55.
- Robson, Colin. 2002. *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Stone, Betty W. 2000. Reading Relish—the Adult Model. *The Book Report* 19 no. 3 (Nov/Dec): 31-32.
- Trelease, Jim and Stephen Krashen. 1996. Eating and Reading in the Library. *Emergency Librarian* 23 (May/Jun): 27.

Appendix A: Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Recreational Reading in High School Media Centers

You have been asked to participate in a case study of recreational reading in high school media centers. This research project will comprise my Master's paper, written to fulfill requirements for the Master's degree in Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the role recreational reading plays in high school media centers. Your participation will consist of one interview, approximately an hour in length. If you are willing, your participation could also include follow-up questions by phone or email. If you agree, I will tape our interview and/or make notes. I plan to interview four high school media specialists during this study.

I am the only person who will have access to data associated with your name. When I write my Master's paper, I will not refer to you or your school by name; the data you provide will be kept confidential.

I am not aware of any risks that would result from your participation in this study. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may also choose to not answer specific questions and still continue to participate.

Please feel free to contact me, Betsy Spackman (919.933.4419; spacke@email.unc.edu), or Dr. Evelyn Daniel (919.962.8062; daniel@ils.unc.edu), my faculty advisor, at any time if you have questions about this study.

Please contact the UNC-CH Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board at (919) 962-7761 or aa-irb@unc.edu if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Please sign and date this form to indicate that you agree to participate in this study, and keep one copy for your records.

Participant's signature

Date

Participant's printed name

Appendix B: Interview Questions

General

- What is the role of recreational reading in your library?
- What reading encouragement activities go on at your library?
- What do you think the role of recreational reading in school media centers should be?
- How do you feel about recreational reading in your library?
- Do you think recreational reading in your library has changed over the past few years? Are there trends in education or at your school that have affected this?
- What recreational reading activities would you like to do if you had unlimited resources?

Programming

- Do you offer any programming related to recreational reading?
- If not, do you sponsor any special events, contests, or similar activities?
- If yes, what type of programming do you do?
- For each program:
 - Please describe the activities of the program step by step.
 - How many students attend the program, on average?
 - Is the program ongoing or one-time?
 - Do you advertise for your program? How?

Readers' Advisory

- Do you provide any readers' advisory materials (booklists, reference materials) for students or teachers? What kind?
- Do you suggest books to your students?
- If yes, how often? To how many students?
- Do you suggest books to teachers or administration?
- If yes, how often? To how many teachers?

Public Relations

- Do you participate in any public relations activities about recreational reading in your library?
Examples of public relations activities related to recreational reading:
 - Sending letters to parents
 - Attending and presenting at PTA meetings
 - Attending and presenting at faculty meetings
 - Giving book talks in classrooms and in the library
 - Maintaining material on the library website
 - Maintaining library bulletin boards
 - Maintaining display boards outside of the library
- How often do you work on public relations activities?

About the Media Specialist

- How many years have you been at this school?
- When did you graduate with your Master's in Library Science?